

# Compromise urged on Exide

■ State Rep. Dante Santoni Jr. offers to act as a mediator in the controversy over the company's plan to treat lead-tainted material.

By Carl W. Brown Jr.

*Eagle/Times*

State Rep. Dante Santoni Jr. offered Thursday night to help bring together opposing sides to discuss

controversial issues surrounding Exide Corp. operations in Laureldale and Muhlenberg Township.

Santoni, a freshman Democrat from Muhlenberg, made the pitch at the end of a 90-minute talk in the Muhlenberg Middle School by state Sen. James J. Rhoades, a Schuylkill County Republican.

Rhoades was invited to speak by the Local Environmental Awareness Development Group of Berks County, a citizens group known as

LEAD that opposes Exide's plan to treat about 60,000 tons of lead-tainted material from a Superfund site in Tilden Township at its Laureldale/Muhlenberg facilities.

The group also has been critical of Exide's approach toward cleaning up lead-contaminated soil around its industrial-battery manufacturing and recycling operations.

See Exide, Page B2 ►

## ► Exide

*Continued from Page B1*

The senator was invited because of his involvement in battling proposed incinerators in Schuylkill County that would burn petroleum-contaminated soil.

After Rhoades offered to set up a meeting among LEAD members, union representatives and Exide corporate officials, Santoni stood up and proposed serving as the intermediary.

"I will do everything I can to work this problem out," Santoni said.

"It's all yours," Rhoades responded with a smile. "Thank you."

Rhoades pointed out that he was not taking sides in the Exide dispute, mainly because he did not have the knowledge or expertise on the issues to do so. But he repeatedly stressed several points during his talk before about 60 people, several who are Exide employees.

The health and safety of people should be the overriding concern of everyone involved, Rhoades said. He also recommended that all sides try to reach a compromise, rather than battle each other.

Supporting the compromise approach was Gerald F. Waldbiesser, president of Local 5227 of the United Steelworkers of America, which represents more than 400 workers at Exide. Waldbiesser told Rhoades that he has been trying to get the opposing sides together to discuss the issues.

Rhoades said that if all the par-

ties can't reach an understanding, "then do battle." But he warned that the adversarial approach could get expensive, since lawyers and technical experts usually need to be hired.

The senator said groups such as LEAD need to be organized and need the support of the community to be successful. Group members also should educate themselves on legal and technical matters, and then use that knowledge to ask meaningful questions, he said.

Rhoades, who is serving his 13th year as a state legislator, emphasized that the work of a citizens group should not fall on the shoulders of just a few people. Instead, he said, all members should share responsibilities.

AR302142